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Contipelli, Ernani

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TRUMP'S DOCTRINE AND CLIMATE CHANGE NEW CHALLENGES FOR GLOBAL GOVERNANCE

Dr. Ernani Contipelli

Trump's Doctrine and Climate Change New Challenges for Global Governance

By Dr. Ernani Contipelli

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Abstract: *The present communication aims to discuss the main topics related to Trump's Doctrine and its effects on the implementation of global governance to fight against Climate Change. To present the argument, first, we will analyze the relation between global governance and climate change, followed by a general view of the climate change by some Republican Party members, and finally, the current policies already put in place by President Trump.*

Key Words: *Climate Change, Global Governance, Donald Trump, Republican Party.*

Introduction

The election of the Republican candidate Donald Trump as the forty-fifth President of the United States was observed with a mix of surprise and concern. Considering his campaign's discourse, based on the nationalist slogan, "*American first*" and some controversial promises against immigration, globalization, and global order, Donald Trump proposed the adoption of controversial measures in foreign policies, such as, the enlargement of a wall on the Mexican border, the retirement of the country from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, also known as TPP, and



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the reinforcement of the American military presence in some “hot” areas, as in the case of the Chinese Sea, on account of the North Korea affairs.

Among all these important global issues, the international community appears to be particularly concerned about President Trump's approach to climate change. His position seems to be running against the progress accomplished until now, in terms of international commitment, to tackle climate change and global warming, for example, the signing of the Paris Agreement on COP 21, in December 2015, involving 195 nations, including key actors such as China.

This communication aims to present the main topics related to Trump's Doctrine and its effects on the implementation of global governance to fight against Climate Change. To present the argument, first, we will analyze the relation between global governance and climate change, followed by a general view of the climate change by some Republican Party members, and finally, the current policies already put in place by President Trump.

1. Global Governance and Climate Change.

The relation between global governance and climate change is uncomplicated. Climate change could be situated among one of the entitled “*problems without passport*” as well-defined by Kofi Annan, former Secretary General of UN. It means issues that can only be treated by overpassing frontiers, problems that do not belong to this nation or that nation, but the whole world, demanding cooperative efforts on a global level, to find their solutions.

Kofi Annan highlights the relevance of climate change for the contemporary global society, affirming that it “*is not just an environmental issue (...) it is an all-encompassing threat. It is a threat to health. It could imperil the world's food supply. It could endanger the very ground on which nearly half the world's population live. Climate change is also a threat to peace and security*”[1].

In other words, climate change is one of the biggest challenges of the contemporary society demanding wide international cooperation to engage nations and other international actors in the implementation of global governance, in order to search for common solutions for this environmental problem that affect our way of life.

From the perspective of global governance, climate change is analyzed through three meaningful institutional treaties: The United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), the Kyoto Protocol, and the Paris Agreement, which represent progressive strengthening in terms of intergovernmental cooperation to tackle climate change and global warming, by the adoption of political measures established under the terms of the mentioned international documents.

Initially, the climate change issue was discussed only in the scientific arena. The development of scientific knowledge during the 1980s and the engagement of some non-governmental actors, such as environmental NGOs, increased their research on the ideas of the international community toward climate change, especially, in order to take some global action to contain the emission of greenhouse gases by human activities.

In this sense, in 1988, the UN General Assembly formed a resolution on climate change, declaring it “*a common concern of mankind*”, converting the preservation of the earth's atmosphere and the confrontation of global warming as an intergovernmental affair that demanded international solidarity and efforts of all the UN members to adopt national measures to reduce their emission levels of greenhouse gases.

After that, in 1992, the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) was opened for signature, establishing a “framework agreement” with basic elements and general obligations for “*future work through regular meetings of the parties and the possible adoption of more substantive protocols*”[2].

The UNFCC, as an international treaty, represents the first step to combating climate change through international cooperation and joint action among UN members, prospecting the implementation of other mechanisms and Institutions to complement its general terms.

Sequentially, the need for a legally binding document based on the UNFCC leads to negotiations to confirm the Kyoto Protocol as a binding document that defines timetables and targets and quantifies emission limitation and reduction objectives, currently involving 192 countries/parties.

The next consistent step on the international efforts to fight against climate change was the 2015 Paris Agreement, which aimed to strengthen global response by intensifying actions to keep the rise in earth's temperature “*well below*” 2°C above pre-industrial levels. Moreover, the Agreement proposed a set of actions and investments to reinforce the capacity of countries to deal with the impact of climate change.

Apart from the discussion about the effectiveness of the actions proposed under the Paris Agreement, it is important to highlight that U.S. has joined China to formally ratify the pact, demonstrating the commitment assumed by the world's two biggest economies, which represent 40% of the global emission of greenhouse gases, to cooperate on environmental actions and to strengthen their leadership in constructing an international climate framework.

All the mentioned international documents represent significant steps toward the implementation of a future “*climate governance*” that could engage nations, leaders, and the whole society in the protection of the earth's atmosphere and its natural resources for the present and future generations, by establishing frameworks, obligations, and voluntary actions to promote international cooperation against global warming.



2. The General View of the Republican Party about Climate Change.

An article published in the Rolling Stones Magazine, called “*Why Republicans Still Reject the Science of Global Warming*” — there is a mention of Henry Waxman, a Democratic congressman, who maintained that the Republican Party considered the protection of fossil fuels as a dogma, a religion: the Church of Carbon. According to him, if the Republicans believe that climate change exists, it certainly is not caused by human activity, which means it denies the scientific evidence that is becoming irrefutable.[3].

Indeed, most of the members of the Republican Party deny the existence of climate change. The only problem in this situation is that they are now in charge of the most powerful country in the history, ignoring what is happening to the world and dismantling institutions that could give some hope for the future of humanity.

Of course, inside the Republican Party, there are different perspectives on climate change, from a moderate level to extremists, dividing the institution between those who believe that human activity does not impact global warming, considering it a natural phenomenon and others that simply refute its existence.

It is possible to illustrate part of the Republican view on climate change with the position of Ted Cruz, one of the Republican runners for the White House, who considers it a global conspiracy created to establish “*massive government control of the economy, the energy sector, and every aspect of our lives*”.

Another example, a little bit more radical, is the vision of the Republican Senator James Inhofe, who headed the Senate Committee on the environment, affirming: “*God’s still up there and there’s a reason for this to happen, so it is sacrilegious for mere humans to interfere*”. In other words, God is warming the earth, so be it! It would be sacrilegious to interfere in God’s will (“*The Great Hoax: How the Global Warming Conspiracy Threatens your Future*”).

In 2015, a study confirmed that over half of the Congressional Republicans confront or deny climate science. Moreover, the 2016 Republican platform confirms this point of view when it proposes to “*forbid the Environmental Protection Agency to regulate carbon dioxide*” and openly stimulates the enlargement of oil production by supporting some initiatives such as hydraulic fracturing and opening up the public land and ocean for further oil exploration.

Therefore, the Republican Party explicitly aims to reduce Federal US commitment against climate change and global warming, dismantling the engagement of key institutions in the Environment Protection Agency and encouraging policies with little to no regard for the environment, in the name of expanding opportunities for profit from fossil fuel exploitation.

3. Trump's Doctrine, Climate Change, and Global Governance.



First of all, what would be Trump's Doctrine? After U.S. strikes in Syria under President Trump's orders, the Press Secretary Sean Spicer explained his foreign policy, with the following declaration: *"The Trump Doctrine is something that he articulated throughout the campaign, which is America first"*, and complemented, *"We are going to make sure that our national interests, both economic and national security, are at the front"* (10/04/2017).

The mentioned statement was a clear answer to an article published two days prior in the New York Times, by Peter Baker, entitled: *"The Emerging Trump Doctrine: Don't Follow Doctrine"*. According to this article, President Trump "made certain that nothing was certain about his foreign policy", arguing that his Doctrine could be, to assume in a few words: "Don't get roped in by doctrine"[4].

This conclusion was motivated by the fact that President Trump, as a regular citizen, declared on several occasions that Syria's civil war was not America's problem, that Russia should be an ally and China the *"enemy"*. Just in a few months, as President Trump engaged U.S. in Syria's civil war, he created a strong disagreement with Russia, and held a meeting with Xi Jinping in order to discuss new forms of cooperation between America and China.

Obviously, the establishment of a foreign policy doctrine depends on a series of concrete facts and decisions to act in the international arena, which can leave, over a long period of time, some mark, a kind of characteristic that defines the recognized profile of one leader and that will happen with President Trump.

Until now, the Trump Doctrine appears to be *"don't follow any doctrine"*. The President has presented his foreign policy marked by contradictions and incoherencies. This factor could be an advantage in terms of climate change.

When he was the Grand Old Party (GOP) runner for Presidency, on several occasions, President Trump declared that he did not believe human activities were intervening with the warmth on the planet, demonstrating a skeptic view of the situation, as he considers it a natural effect of the weather: *"Unless somebody can prove something to me, I believe there's weather. I believe there's change (...) and it changes depending on years and centuries, but I am not a believer, and we have much bigger problems"* (radio host Hugh Hewitt in September 2016).

When he had another opportunity, President Trump made clear his skeptic position about climate change and global warming in an emblematic tweet: *"The concept of global warming was created by and for the Chinese in order to make U.S. manufacturing non-competitive"*, reducing the importance of the situation and restricting it to America's economic and competitive interests.

Furthermore, President Trump has assumed a critical opinion about former President Obama's efforts to contain climate change and the fact that his predecessor elected this problem as *"the*



number one in the world today". According to President Trump, there are more pressing issues that U.S. has to focus its attention on and confront today than climate change, such as, terrorism.

One of the main policies of former President Obama's Administration criticized by President Trump was the Clean Power Plan, which comprised of a set of regulations to curb global warming by cutting the emissions of carbon dioxide from the existing fossil fuel-powered electricity plants. In fact, the Clean Power Plan was to demonstrate to the world that the U.S. was seriously engaged in the global fight against climate change and was cooperating with the implementation of the Paris Agreement. The plan represented *"the most significant part of the strategy, to cut emission by the amount specified in the Paris agreement.*[5].

The first attack by President Trump against the Clean Power Plan occurred on March 16, 2017, when the *"First American"* budget was presented, which proposed a deep cut in the Environmental Protection Agency's funding, especially related to climate change research programs and partnerships. Mick Mulvaney, White House budget director, clearly declared that President Trump's Administration had no interest in funding actions to confront climate change, affirming: *"We're not spending money on that anymore. We consider that to be a waste of your money"*.

Furthermore, the proposed budget eliminates U.S. funding to two important initiatives against climate change: the Global Climate Change Program of the US for International Development (USAID) and to the Green Climate Fund of the UN, both programs aim to support nations in the process of adaptation to climate change and to develop clean energy growth.

Sequentially, on March 28, 2017, President Trump signed an executive order on Energy Independence, to undo former President Obama's plan, motivated by the fact that he pretended to bring back coal mining jobs, create new jobs in the fossil fuel industry, and reduce the cost of electricity. This particular case is a conclusive example of the incoherence (or coherence) that emphasizes President Trump's Doctrine.

Less than two months after he signed the executive order that banned the Clean Power Plan, justifying it on the regeneration of jobs in the coal mining industry, President Trump, on May 12, announced a new trade deal with China to support the natural gas industry, which according to some analysts, will *"starve coal to a slow death by devouring the U.S. electricity market it once dominated"*. [6].

President Trump's new trade deal with China, which once he called the *"real American enemy"*, will destroy the coal industry that he promised to help, demonstrating the inconsistency (or consistency) of his decisions based on *"don't follow any doctrine"*.

Scott Pruitt, the head of the Environmental Protection Agency nominated by President Trump, who on some occasions sustained the absence of scientific proof of global warming caused by human activity, claimed that the review of the Clean Power Plan would be *"pro-growth and pro-environment"* and also called the Paris Agreement a *"bad deal"* for US interests.



Even with the Clean Power Plan, the U.S. would reach the targets proposed by the Paris Agreement, but without alternatives or any other comparable rule, President Trump signals that the country will not contribute to its national obligations determined under the agreement, showing his option for a path different from the rest of the world.

For sure, the retirement of U.S. from the Paris Agreement represents a meaningful stroke in the fight against climate change and global warming, removing any expectation of a future implementation of a global governance and environmental international cooperation that could seriously face the problem and protect the planet.

In any case, President Trump's decision about pulling the U.S. out of the Paris Agreement will be taken after the next G7 Summit in Italy, when his adviser will deliver him a final recommendation. Considering the terms of the Trump's Doctrine, anything can happen, it can even remain in the global accord to try to reshape it. If something like that occurs, on the one hand, it will be a great opportunity to analyze the dynamics of the Trump's Doctrine, on the other, it could be a decision that could negatively or positively affect the sole fight against climate change that has been going on until now. We will never know, the Trump's Doctrine is always a surprise.

4. Doomsday Clock and Global Disaster.

Climate change is occurring faster than ever before and the current time of the Doomsday Clock can prove this consideration.

The Doomsday Clock was created in 1945, using the imagery of apocalypse (midnight), by the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, who each year decided to move or to leave in place the minute hand of the clock, according to the indicator of the world's vulnerability to catastrophe from nuclear weapons, climate change, and new technologies.

In 2017, the Doomsday Clock Statement Science and Security Board, the Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists, has decided to settle the clock at two-and-a-half minutes to midnight, the closest to the apocalypses since the nuclear crisis between U.S. and Russia in 1947, affirming that *"the probability of global catastrophe is very high, and the actions needed to reduce the risks of disaster must be taken very soon"*. [7].

In what concerns climate change, the Bulletin warns that the actions to combat climate change and global carbon dioxide emission under the framework of the Paris Agreement were essentially flat in 2016, and the countries did not seem to be very interested in promoting the necessary additional cuts to keep the temperature of the earth below 2 degrees Celsius, during the COP 22, that took place in Marrakesh, November 2016: *"the international community did not take the steps needed to begin the path toward a net zero-carbon-emission world. The Marrakech Climate Change Conference, for instance, produced little progress beyond the emission goals pledged under the Paris Accord"*.



The election of Donald Trump and his “*disbelief in the overwhelming scientific consensus on climate change*” contributes to this threatening world situation: “*The Trump transition team has put forward candidates for cabinet-level positions (especially at the Environmental Protection Agency and Energy Department) who foreshadow the possibility that the new administration will be openly hostile to progress toward even the most modest efforts to avert catastrophic climate disruption.*”

As it was presented previously, a significant part of the Republican Party denies that human activity contributes to global warming, refusing any bound commitment established through international treaties to contain it by cutting emission of greenhouse gases.

With regard to this particular position of the Republican Party, Noam Chomsky pointed out that: “*It is an astonishing fact about the current era that in the most powerful country in world history, with a high level of education and privilege, one of the two political parties virtually denies the well-established facts about anthropogenic climate change*”. And the author continues with his critiques, arguing that the world’s most powerful country in the history, virtually alone, races us toward disaster with enthusiasm and dedication and President Trump’s Administration helps the process by accelerating the oil boom[8].

As mentioned before, the world has an advantage: We will never know what the decision made by President Trump will be. The inconsistency, pragmatism, and incoherence of his Doctrine could have positive factors in this case. Some analysts try to figure out President Trump’s decision, such as William Becker (2017), who believes that “*Trump would decide that despite his personal feelings about climate change, it is in the best interests of the country to remain a constructive party to the Paris Agreement. This would comply with the guidance the President has received from many corporates, states, and local leaders, as well as the wishes of the large majority of the American people*”. [9].

After banning former President Obama’s climate policies, President Trump’s Administration has left little to contribute to reaching the targets established by the Paris Agreement, as also it’s remaining in the accord could delay or even obstruct the climate action progress. However, it is difficult to think about real international cooperation to combat climate change without the most powerful and influential country in the world and the second-largest global carbon polluter being present in its fold.

Conclusion

Of course, climate change is a super-complex and long-term problem that demands action right now, not only from the U.S., but also from the whole world, to quit pumping carbon dioxide into the atmosphere and to control the earth’s temperature below dangerous levels.



Therefore, it is time to focus global attention on the mitigation targets, to keep the Paris Accord alive by reverting the way of the political and economic system based on “*carbon economy*”. Finally, climate change is not just an environmental problem; it is truly an economic problem that is connected to the challenges of global governance. However, it is not late to support the carbon-free energy sources, generating a “*green new deal*” that links economy, energy, and environment as proposed by Naomi Klein.[10].

According to the scenario designed by the Emission Gap Report 2016, it is necessary to significantly strengthen the idea of emission reduction, to reach the decisions of the Paris Agreement on “*well below 2°C*” and for “pursuing efforts to limit temperature increase to 1.5°C”. Actually, the total global greenhouse gas (GHG) emission continues to increase, reaching approximately 52.7 gigatonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂e) in 2014. This scenario will continue a little bit further from the Paris Agreement target of 2°C, which represents around 44 gigatonnes carbon dioxide equivalent (GtCO₂e) in 2020[11].

The actions that each national government will take under the Paris Agreement's Intended Nationally Determined Contributions (INDCs) are the key to initiating global emission reductions, which agree to long-term ambitions. Nevertheless, there are rough differences among the countries to reach their own INDCs and their social and economic conditions play an important role in this context, to define the capacity of one nation to resolve its differences in development and mitigation.

As the leader of the free world, U.S. would be a very significant actor to build the appropriate scenario for the establishment of a “*green new deal*” based on the implementation of global governance and President Trump's Administration has the opportunity to start this process by, at least, accepting that climate change needs immediate and efficient political action, in order to avoid a world disaster that could put at risk the existence of human kind.

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About the Author:

Dr. Ernani Contipelli is the Director-General and one of the founding members of the Center for European Strategic Research (CESR). Currently, he is a Professor of Globalization and Environmental Law at the Faculty of Juridical Sciences of the Unochapeco (Brazil). He obtained two post-doctorate degrees in Comparative Politics at the Universidad Complutense de Madrid and Universitat Pompeu Fabra (Spain) and a PhD in Public Law at the Pontificia Universidade Católica de São Paulo (Brazil). He has various experiences in the academic field working as Visiting Research and Professor in different countries such as Spain, Italy, France, Brazil, Mexico, Chile, Korea, China, and others. He has published seven books and several articles concerning his research areas of interests: Comparative Politics and Constitutionalism, Latin



American Studies, International Development Cooperation and Climate Change, and Emerging Powers and Global Governance.

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